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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1541
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3593
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2984
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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SUBJECT: KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARIANS VISIT TRANSIT CENTER

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On September 15, the Manas Transit Center hosted a delegation of Kyrgyz Parliamentarians and other officials for a briefing and tour of Center facilities. The delegation, led by Vice Speaker Isabekov, pressed for more contracts to be awarded to Kyrgyz firms, especially those selling fruits and vegetables. The group also advocated for an increase in the flow of information from the Transit Center, and offered to help get out the word on the benefits of the Center for Kyrgyzstan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On September 15, eight members of Parliament, along with Deputy Foreign Minister Baktygul Kalambekova, visited the Transit Center to meet with the Center's director and tour the facilities. The delegation was led by Vice Speaker Kubanychbek Isabekov and consisted exclusively of Ak Jol (governing majority) party members. Their stated aim was to observe any operational or structural changes since the signing of the new Transit Center agreement and ensure that the U.S. was meeting all terms of the agreement. After receiving a mission brief, the delegation toured housing and recreation facilities, the cargo holding area, and climbed aboard a KC-135 refueler for a first-hand look at one of the Center's primary missions. A group of local television crews and newspaper reporters accompanied the MPs throughout the visit.

BUY KYRGYZ!

¶3. (SBU) An ongoing theme among the Parliamentarians was the push for the Transit Center to purchase more goods, primarily fruits and vegetables, from Kyrgyz vendors. The MPs pressed for Kyrgyz companies to be given priority when the Transit Center awarded contracts (which is provided for in the bilateral agreement). In an effort to help Kyrgyz firms become more competitive, the Parliamentarians requested additional information regarding the U.S. military's quality standards for consumable products.

EDUCATION ON POSITIVE EFFECTS

14. (SBU) During the visit, the MPs tabled additional requests of the Transit Center Director to help them educate their constituents about the Transit Center and the positive effect it has on the Kyrgyz population. The delegation asked for more information about humanitarian assistance efforts conducted by the Transit Center, suggesting that a report detailing the Center's activities be sent to Parliament each month.

15. (SBU) Vice Speaker Isabekov suggested that the Transit Center provide more articles to the Kyrgyz language press, stating that the Kyrgyz people "don't know about your positive impact." The Parliamentarians asked about fuel dumping and the Transit Center's ecological impact on the surrounding area. The MPs were assured that the joint Kyrgyz-U.S. ecological committee, established as a result of the new Transit Center agreement, would investigate and analyze any environmental issues that may arise.

PRESS REPORTING

16. (SBU) Press reporting on the visit has been mostly positive, continuing the trend of the President's September 11 visit to the Transit Center. The three leading Kyrgyz television stations, National TV and Radio (NTRC), Channel 1, and NTS TV all provided detailed positive coverage of the visit. NTRC led with previous footage of the President's visit before starting coverage of the Parliamentary visit. The story picked up the theme of the Parliamentarians' interest in more local contracts for the Transit Center. The piece ended with a clip of Isabekov saying that he was fully

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satisfied with the visit, that everyone could see that the Center was functioning in accordance with the agreement and that there were no weapons, nuclear devices, or other illegal items at the Center.

17. (SBU) Vecherniy Bishkek, the most widely circulated newspaper, carried a story with a slightly ironic tone, under the headline "The Americans got closer to us by 60 million dollars." The article noted that 'friendly relations' between our two countries increased from 17 million USD to 60 million USD. Following this, the article, like the other news stories, then focused mainly on the Parliamentarians' interest in increasing local contracts. The most critical of the articles, in the Kyrgyz supplement of Russia-based "Moskovskiy Komsomolets," poked fun at the Parliamentarians for pushing for local contracts while "they feverishly stuffed their bags with foreign chocolates." However, even this piece was not negative towards the Transit Center.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) The Parliamentarians and accompanying press were obviously impressed at their access to the Transit Center) and with the facilities themselves. After seeing the living quarters and eating at the dining hall, one Parliamentarian joked to an Embassy Officer that he would not mind serving in the U.S. military given the "high quality" living conditions.

We expect that the increased coverage and visibility of the operations of the Transit Center should help reduce the negative rumors and speculation in the media. Our next step will be to highlight the humanitarian work of the Center and its employees in order to build public support for its continuing operation.

GFOELLER